

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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Reflection

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Isaiah 66:10-14c.

Galatians 6:14-18.

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

In our readings today, the church presents us with two intertwining themes: the utterly *radical* tender and unconditional love that our God has for us and our ongoing responsibilities to *step into that love* and to *realize its fuller presence* in our earth world and church today. Let's reflect on the first theme so intimately presented in the Isaiah text. After several generations, the Jewish people have been freed from their Babylonian exile and are returning to Jerusalem, the temple being the source and strength of their life in God. They are going home! And what an analogy Isaiah uses to welcome them back!

I remember - some nineteen years ago now - visiting my niece, her husband Mike, and their four-week-old boy named Kevin. I sat in a chair in their living room, Mike was laying on the couch, and Katy was in a chair nursing Kevin. I watched how he clung to her chest, "sucking at her abundant breast," as Isaiah puts it today. When Kevin then turned away, fully sufficient with his nourishment for the time being, Mike asked Katy to hand the baby over to him. I got a bit nervous thinking that Mike was going to drop him because Mike didn't get up from the couch. He stretched out his arm and welcomed Kevin, his head snugly in Mike's hand, and his body extended along the length of Mike's arm. Then, something extraordinary happened. Kevin grabbed Mike's thumb and Mike said, "Wow! He couldn't do that yesterday!"

Isaiah uses this utterly intimate image to lay before the Jewish people how much God will make Jerusalem flourish, even in the midst of their struggles to get reacquainted with their homeland. "I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child" and "I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river." It's as if he says to the Jewish people, "Take hold of my love now; embrace it fully. Otherwise, your Temple worship will mean nothing."

There is a similar challenge in Galatians and Luke today. Paul is dealing with gentile Galatians in current day central Turkey, but some Jews who have converted to the Christian message insist that these newcomers must be circumcised. Paul gets right to the point: There is now a *new creating* coming from the cross of Christ. Paul boasts not of his successes in preaching the good news, but rather from the marks that he bears on his body from his stoning and flogging, as a sign of his absolute union with Christ crucified. And we know Paul is headed toward Rome where he will be crucified.

In Luke, Jesus and his disciples have *turned now* toward Jerusalem, leaving behind their preaching in Galilee. He enhances the Twelve and the women who have followed him in Galilee by calling 72, more disciples, sending them ahead in pairs to the

towns and villages on his way up to Jerusalem. He directs them: simplify your life. Greet people with “*sholom bayit*, “Peace in this household,” and insist on nothing special to eat or drink. Jesus gives the 72 the power to heal the sick as a sign that it is *the household of God* that is there for you. He also warns them not to rejoice in their new powers. Rather, rejoice in the fact that you are sent to preach and teach and heal, and thus engaged in the *new creating*.

And so, what about us who are *also* called to embrace God’s radical intimate love for us, incarnated bodily as we are in Christ who has taken on our flesh, and fed graciously by His body and blood. We too are called to simplify our lives and participate in the new creating – like Kevin grasping his father’s thumb which he couldn’t do yesterday.

What is new for us today and tomorrow and into the future? We must commit to and sustain a new creating rather than being overwhelmed by all that crosses our TV screen these days: climate change crises producing floods and fires and starvation and thirst; women and children in migration from the Ukraine and certain African countries into Europe; horrific gang profiteering along our southern border from young men simply looking for work and unaccompanied children seeking placement with family members in the US; facing our white privilege and its impact on continuing racism; the oppression of LGBTQX persons by society and our church teachings.

Let us enjoy the fireworks and take pride in our country and homeland, as we celebrate this 4th of July holiday. Let us also recall the words of Martin Luther King Jr., a man of deep faith and hope and love. “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” “Our goal” he said over and over again, “is to create a beloved community and this will require a *qualitative* change in our souls as well as a *quantitative* change in our lives.” Our readings today call us to this: “Be in God together and keep on working away at justice, creating more and more equality and justice for all people and creatures of this earth community. May our loving God nurture all of us in this ever-ongoing new creating!

“Wow! He couldn’t do that yesterday!”